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AUTHOR Firestone, William A.; Rosenblum, Sheila
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ABSTRACT

Problems of urban high schools, including poor attendance, high dropout rates, low achievement, and poor social relationships, are linked together by a strong sense of alienation among students and teachers. Yet much of the educational research and policy treat these issues separately. In this study a conceptual framework for understanding student and teacher commitment is presented and illustrated with data from a field study of 10 urban high schools. An open-ended interview approach was used to obtain information on school factors, student commitment, and teacher commitment. The findings showed how teachers and students are in conflict even though they are members of two mutually dependent subcultures. Teachers and students must respect and affiliate with one another. Teachers must make schoolwork interesting for students. Administrative tasks and paperwork must be decreased to a level that does not burden teachers. Administrative support for teachers is needed. Strategies for maximizing commitment must include attention to the following five school factors: (1) relevance; (2) respect; (3) support; (4) expectations; and (5) influence. (VM)

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THE ALIENATION AND COMMITMENT OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS

William A. Firestone
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

Sheila Rosenblum
Wilkes-Barre, PA

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ABSTRACT

A conceptual framework for understanding student and teacher commitment is presented and illustrated with data from a field study of ten urban high schools. Three points are made. First, alienation and commitment is multidimensional: teachers and students make a variety of commitments that affect the nature of their work. Second, teacher and student commitments are mutually reinforcing. If one is low, it will depress the other. Finally, five school factors are identified that can increase commitments: relevance, respect, support, expectations, and influence.

IDENTIFYING CITATIONS

Firestone, W. A. (1980). Great expectations for small schools: The limitations of federal projects. New York: Praeger.

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THE ALIENATION AND COMMITMENT OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS

> [A bad day is] when you think you're really cooking and they say, "Can I go to the bathroom?" When you look into their eyes and you can see clear out of the backs of their heads.
>
> - A Teacher

> Bad teachers are lazy, unorganized, disrespectful, prejudiced, and impatient.
>
> - A Student

Urban comprehensive schools face a series of related problems including poor attendance, high dropout rates, low achievement, and poor relationships among different ethnic groups. What links these problems is a strong sense of alienation among the students exhibiting them and the need to build their commitment to schooling (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986). Yet, policy makers typically focus on each of the separate problems in a piecemeal fashion without addressing this underlying issue (Newman, 1981). In fact some policies, like tightened graduation standards, risk increasing student alienation and raising dropout rates (Hamilton, 1986; McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1985).

Similar problems occur among teachers. Earlier when the teaching force was younger, high turnover was endemic in urban high schools (Becker, 1952; Bruno & Doscher, 1981). The current group of older teachers often feels trapped in positions it does not want and experiences a strong sense of burnout. Informally, school administrators refer to this syndrome as "on-the-job retirement." It affects teachers' preparation for lessons, relationships with students, and absenteeism and is another manifestation of alienation (Dworkin, 1986; Farber, 1984).

The problems of student and teacher alienation are typically treated separately, for instance through dropout programs and reforms to

professionalize teaching. Yet, teachers and students spend so much time together that the orientations of each should influence those of the other. Moreover, the orientations of both groups should be strongly influenced by a variety of school characteristics.[1] This paper proposes a conceptual framework to clarify the relationships among school factors, teacher alienation and commitment and the alienation and commitment of students. The framework results from exploratory study of ten inner city, comprehensive high schools, conducted for the superintendents of the Baltimore, Newark, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Washington, DC school districts.[2]

The framework is based on a view of alienation and commitment as related concepts. These two terms are rarely used in the same analysis, but they are roughly opposites (Dworkin, 1986). That is, commitment represents a positive attachment while alienation is a negative attachment. Etzioni (1961), for instance, distinguishes among alienative involvement, calculative involvement, and moral involvement which he also terms commitment. Alienative involvement designates an intensely negative, even hostile orientation such as that of prisoners to their captors and slaves to their owners. Commitment reflects an intense positive involvement such as that of a member of a religious sect or an extreme political party. In between is the area of calculative involvement where the individual has neutral orientation but will comply with requests or

---

[1] The alienation and commitment of students and teachers are also influenced by a wide range of forces outside the school ranging from institutionalized racism to the operation of labor markets for both youth and adults (Dworkin, 1986; Fine, 1986). While these are acknowledged, this paper focuses on the dynamics of alienation and commitment inside the school.

[2] The study was an activty for the Mid-Atlantic Metropolitan Council, a consortium of the superintendents of those five cities put together by Research for Better Schools, an the US Department of Education funded Laboratory located in Philadelphia. Details of the study and its relationship to the districts are described in author (1987).

orders if incentives are sufficient.

As a negative attachment, alienation often results from some perception of loss. Seeman (1975) identifies six distinct kinds of loss: a) powerlessness, the sense of low control over relevant events, b) meaninglessness, the sense of incomprehensibility as opposed to understanding of personal and social affairs, c) normlessness or detachment from socially approved means to achieve goals, d) cultural estrangement, the individual's rejection of commonly held values, e) self-estrangement, the individual's involvement in activities that are not intrinsically rewarding, and f) social isolation, the sense of exclusion or rejection.

While alienation emphasizes negative connection, commitment accentuates the positive. Definitions of commitment are numerous (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1982). One whole set focuses on how commitment results from "side-bets"--like pension benefits, skills and contacts accrued over time, and reputation--that bind an individual to a line of work (Becker, 1960). Through cognitive dissonance processes (Festinger, 1964), the individual trapped by these side-bets redefines available rewards to feel committed. Another set views commitment as resulting from the positive satisfactions that accrue from a job and suggests that as those satisfactions decline, individual commitment withers until the person changes work (Mowday et al., 1982). Whatever the processes leading to it, commitment is experienced as "a partisan, affective attachment to the goals and values of an organization, to one's role in relation to goals and values, and to the organization for its own sake, apart from its purely instrumental worth" (Buchanan, 1974: 533). Where such an attachment exists, the committed person is expected to believe strongly in the system's goals and values, comply with orders and expectations voluntarily, be

willing to exert considerable effort beyond minimal expectations for the good of the system, and strongly desire to remain part of that system (Kanter, 1968).

Figure 1 presents graphically a framework for understanding how the alienation and commitment of students and teachers are related to each other and to school characteristics. This figure illustrates three important points.

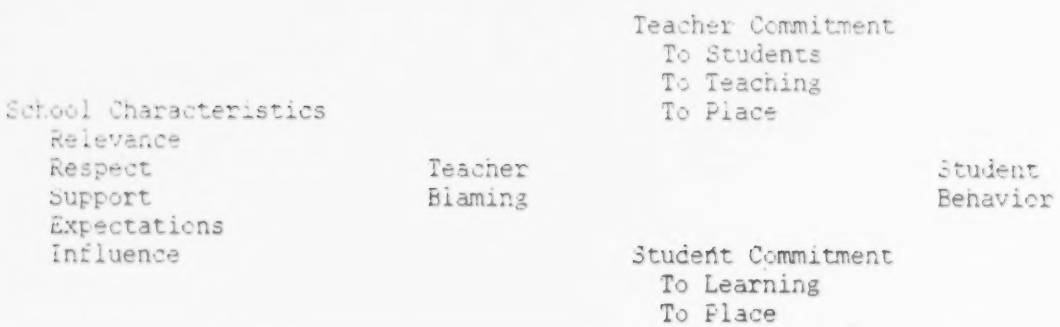

Figure 1. The Dynamics of Teacher and Student Commitment

First, commitment is a multidimensional concept. It is important to understand what the objects of commitment are. Second, teacher and student commitment are mutually reinforcing; there are factors that mediate between the commitments of the two groups. Third, a number of school characteristics affect both teacher and student commitment. After briefly describing the study, these points are expanded with reference to past research and the field work. Finally, an important dilemma in building commitment is identified: the need to have tough standards while building up the subjective intrinsic worth of the individual.

The Study

Data were collected in the district office and two high schools in each city. The superintendent was asked to pick two urban comprehensive high

schools with similar student bodies, one of which reflected the most difficult problems of these schools. The schools are middle sized with a poor, minority population. The median school size is 1553 with three smaller schools having less than 1100 students and two very large ones with over 2500. In seven schools, three-fourths or more of the students are black, and in eight two-fifths or more receive a free lunch. In six schools where data are available, average daily attendance is low, ranging from 72 to 85 percent.

Three person-days were spent in each building. Individual interviews were conducted with the principal, two assistant principals, and a counselor. In addition, interviews were conduct with groups of three to four teachers in English, mathematics, social studies, science, and vocational programs; with two groups totalling four to six department heads; and with at least twelve students. These included three ninth grade (or tenth grade if the school had no younger students) low achievers, three ninth grade high achievers, senior low achievers, and senior high achievers. Thus, at least 35 individuals were interviewed in each school.

Interviews were designed to obtain information on major categories in the conceptual framework--e.g., school factors, student commitment, and teahcer commitment. However, since the study was exploratory, an open-ended approach was used in order to elaborate subcategories and clarify the meaning of developing concepts (Patton, 1980). Questions about commitments included:

a. What kinds of things make teachers/students think about leaving this school?

b. What kinds of things make them think about staying?

c. What things make you feel that you have had a good day in this school?

d. What things make you feel that you have had a bad day?

Specific questions varied somewhat with the respondents' position. Interviewers were given leeway to adjust the questions to local conditions, but all major categories were covered in each school.

After the site visits were completed, a return visit was made to each district to feed back first impressions of each city and school and to give administrators an opportunity to provide additional information that might correct erroneous impressions. Two principals initially questioned the researchers' ability to understand their complex organizations after only one day on site, but both ended their interviews by commenting that their school had been well described.

Dimensions of Alienation and Commitment

Although people often talk about alienation and commitment in general terms, it is important to specify "commitment to what?" There is a substantial literature on commitment to teaching (e.g. Bredson, Fruth, & Kasten, 1983) because one issue for policy makers has been to reduce turnover. Today, however, many older teachers are trapped in their work by economic factors--pension plans and salaries high enough to make changing jobs a sacrifice--so they must keep teaching even though many desperately want to change jobs (Dworkin, 1986). This raises the problem of burnout (Farber, 1984; Maslach 1976) with the associated need to improve performance (as well as the psychological health) of teachers stuck in the system. Similarly, many students keep coming to school even though they do not perform well. Thus, while many urban schools must be concerned about staff and student attrition, maintaining and enhancing performance is equally or more important.

For that reason, it is often important to understand specific commitments. In addition to commitment to a school or occupation, individuals

become committed to specific ways of doing things and work objectives (Salancik, 1977). These specific commitments become quite important; the individual may be unwilling to stay in an organization that does not let them act on those action commitments. Moreover, such commitments become part of a school culture. Some schools are notable, for instance, because teachers share an attachment to particular definitions of what should be taught, of how important teaching is, or of what students are like and what they need (Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone, forthcoming). These commitments affect their performance (Brookover and Colleagues, 1979; Willower & Jones, 1965).

An indirect strategy was used to identify the objects of commitment. Both students and teachers were asked broad questions like "What makes for a good day?" and "Why do (students/teachers) want to stay here?" Responses to these questions suggested five distinct elements of commitment to school.

Teacher Commitments

Three dimensions of teacher commitment were identified. The first was their commitment to students. Teachers said:

> I stay because of the feedback I get from the students I helped. I like to help students. There are times I touch somebody.
>
> I'm helping students. Just the one or two who say they wish I were teaching geometry.
>
> I love the children, and I know they need help. Just knowing that I did some little thing for a few students.

These people get a personal response from their students that makes them feel that their work is worthwhile. Others find their interactions with students alienating:

> You work harder here because of the clientele. After eighteen years, I've put my time in.
>
> They are not learning. School does them no good. They have their

problems. The slow students are barely literate... You get no sense of satisfaction that X student left and learned something.

A second dimension is commitment to teaching which is different from commitment to students. The emphasis is on receiving fulfillment from exercising craft skill. Sometimes this comes from the reaction one sees to a lesson and sometimes from the respect of other teachers:

> Teachers want to stay here because they can teach. They want to come back.
>
> The degree of professionalism here is exceptional. At the school I worked at before, the main topic of discussion was retirement. Here people talk about educational issues, what works. Its intellectually stimulating.
>
> [A good day is] when the students learn. There's a good discussion, a challenging discussion. When you test and everyone does well.

The third dimension is commitment to the specific place. Because of working conditions, social bonds, or just the passage of time, the individual develops a special loyalty to the given school:

> I was a temp. here for my first two years. I was offered a permanent slot at [another school], but I stayed here as a temp. instead...I'm ready to try something different, but I want to do it here. I'd like to get into counseling.
>
> I stay here from habit. I'm comfortable here. I know the people. I've found my niche. Its clear what's expected of you. You know how far you can go.

Teachers also become alienated from specific places. Often they try to overcome this orientation by through the rationalization that all city schools are alike, saying, "Going someplace else doesn't make the grass greener. There are problems everywhere." Others say they stay in the school they dislike because of relatively high salaries or access to retirement benefits or limitations stemming from school rules. These districts require that a teacher who transfers voluntarily lose building seniority which puts that person at risk of being transferred often in the future.

These three different dimensions of commitment provide an affective basis for different kinds of behavior. Commitment to place is associated with considerable loyalty to the school. Its manifestations include continued tenure and willingness to take on a variety of roles, but it does not have implications for how teaching will be carried out. Commitment to students leads to strong emotional bonds with students, often a personal caring for them. When many teachers share this commitment, the result can be a positive climate where students feel comfortable and wanted, but there is no necessary press for high achievement. Commitment to teaching leads to strong concern with the craft aspects of one's work and also to an interest in student achievement; the reward for commitment to teaching is student learning. It also implies high standards and expectations for student achievement that are not part of the more unconditionally accepting commitment to students. However, commitment to teaching without a related interest in students as individuals can lead to an affectively "cold" climate that is not motivating for students.

Student Commitments

Two separate dimensions of student commitment were identified. The first is commitment to learning. Some students indicate that they take seriously the school's primary activity:

> I have a good day when I get the answer to a hard question in class.
>
> In [a special program], you can work independently and help plan your courses. You can suggest projects and topics to work on that interest you.
>
> A good day is when you understand the classwork and you know something new at the end of the day.

Others who are alienated from learning find the instructional activity

something to be tolerated or opposed:

I tolerate teachers. I use "passive resistance" and sleep through class.

A good day is when it goes fast and I get out of here.

A good day is when there's no homework.

Students also become committed to the "place." They did not talk a great deal about this kind of commitment. It appears that school is important because it is where students can come to be with their friends or where they find activities other than educational ones to keep them occupied. These include extracurricular activities but also "hanging around" with others.

The Interplay of Teacher and Student Commitment

Teachers and students form two subcultures that are mutually dependent yet in some conflict. The commitment level of each affects the other because the two groups spend so much time together. The literature on how high academic expectations influences student achievement assumes that adult orientations have a substantial influence on the orientations and actions of students (Brookover et al., 1979; Edmonds, 1979). Moreover, dropouts perceive schools as a place where teachers do not care about them (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986) and perform better in smaller situations where teachers are more committed to helping them (Wehlage et al, 1982).

The idea that teacher commitment reflects that of students is perhaps less obvious. Yet, teachers spend more time with students than adults in school (Lortie, 1975). Moreover, teachers' rewards typically come from knowing that students learn what is taught to them (Bredson, Fruth & Kasten, 1983). When these rewards decline because students lack the commitment (as well as prerequisite skills) to respond appropriately in class, teacher commitment is bound to suffer. In fact teachers often complain about the

problem of teaching apathetic, passive students (Newman, 1981), and student ability is one of the most powerful factors determining teachers' sense of efficacy (Hannaway, 1986).

Interviews in the ten high schools illustrate how teacher and student commitments are related. Students have very clear ideas about the teachers they would like to work with. When asked what makes a good or a bad teacher, they give complex, multipart responses like "a good teacher is fun, caring, devoted, patient, intelligent, a role model, expressive, personal."

There are two major underlying themes in these responses. First, a good teacher exhibits a certain level of respect for students that is appreciated by them. Such teachers do not have what students call "an attitude." This respect is apparent in what teachers say to students, how they act towards students, and how they use their time:

> Some teachers talk down to you like you're stupid when you ask questions.
>
> Some teachers embarrass you in front of the class. They make jokes about failed tests, poor grades, and things.

The second theme focuses on instruction. Students do not expect sophisticated teaching techniques. They want the teacher to make the work interesting. Even more important, however, is having the patience to explain when students do not understand something the first time. Explaining and reexplaining is the dominant theme in students' comments on teachers:

> Good teachers don't get mad when you ask them to repeat a question.
>
> Good teachers, talk to the class and explain things. They are interested and concerned.
>
> A bad teacher is one that does not care, one that tosses the work on the board and don't explain it. One that doesn't involve himself or his work into his students.

Similarly, teachers' commitment to their work comes to a great extent

from the response they get from students. This is a major theme in their explanations for what makes for a good or a bad day.

> [Good days are] when students want to hang around and ask questions. Students keep the seat work or discussion going. Its not teacher centered.
>
> Better days come when students try to experiment with problems and take it a little bit farther. Especially in the Academy. Some of those kids are turned on. They see concepts come alive.

These comments illustrate that teachers get their greatest rewards from working with students who are more responsive and achieve at higher levels. While teachers working with low achieving students may need greater levels of creativity and effort, they often withdraw and do less. The teacher quoted at the beginning of the paper about seeing "clean through their heads" also said "I teach the slows. I've had some awesome days." she went on to say that "I'm just a slow gal" and "This year I have one magnet class. Its like being on sabbatical."

Two factors contribute to the relationship between student and teacher commitment. The first is externalization of responsibility. To preserve their professional self-respect, some teachers blame their students' low achievement on their family backgrounds and blame failure to implement new district initiatives on lack of firm building leadership (Metz, 1986). By shifting responsibility to some other, whether students or administrators, teachers justify their continuation in patterns of behavior that are no longer functional for the current situation.

This blaming phenomenon appears in some of the schools in this study. In these schools, teachers complain about the family background of students and their lack of ability or interest in school work. These teachers are the most likely to decry "creaming," the siphoning off of high achieving students to

other schools or special programs. While students in these schools do come from the kind of impoverished backgrounds that is associated with low achievement, this is also true in other schools in the study. What distinguishes these schools is not the students' situations but the amount of attention teachers give to those situations:

> Because of the open enrollment policy, the better students in the area don't come here. Yet, this school is expected to be like the others. [Schools X and Y] get the better black students. We get aggravation and less results.
>
> They don't care. More black students drop out. They have no family, no foundation. They can go out on the corner and pop a pill....The white students act the same way. They have no incentives. I called one mother about her child not coming to school. She said, he doesn't like school.
>
> The white kids don't want to go to school. They say, "My Dad's making more money than you working in the mill," and they want to do the same thing. The black kids come from broken homes with a mother and no daddy.

These same teachers also talk about lack of administrative support or of "paper work." Again, the complaints often outstrip the impression from direct observation:

> They load us down with paper work and don't handle students the way they need to 'cause they're in a never-never land....Students who cause repeated problems in class are still around....The problem is stupid policies from [the district office] and the federal courts. I'd like to see a judge teach a class where you can't throw a kid out 'cause of his constitutional rights.
>
> I don't dwell on discipline as much as I need to. The administration doesn't support us on discipline. They say do it, but they tie your hands....The tone has to be set at the top. People are socializing when they should be working. I mean administrators.

Student behavior also mediates between student commitment and that of teachers. Teachers are worn down by disruptive behavior in the classroom and in the corridors. They find breaking up fights psychologically draining as well as constantly reminding students to bring necessary equipment to class. Students are most likely to act out when they become alienated from the school

and would prefer to be somewhere else but have not yet decided to leave.

Blaming and student behavior are the factors that mediate between teacher and student orientations and create mutually reinforcing cycles of commitment and alienation. Students who do not understand their coursework withdraw from class and often become disruptive. Getting little positive response and a great deal of negative, teachers shift responsibility to others, both students and administrators. They become lethargic or impatient, stop explaining things to students, and in extreme cases become verbally abusive. These behaviors in turn depress student commitment still further. It is probably unimportant where the cycle begins. Once a student who has been in school for eight or more years meets a teacher with similar experience, both are well-primed to play out their parts of the cycle.

School Factors and Commitment

These mutually reinforcing cycles of student and teacher commitment are influenced by the school context in which they operate. The field work and literature review identify five sets of school factors that affect how these cycles of alienation and commitment are played out. These factors include relevance, respect and affiliation, support, expectations, and influence.

Relevance

Relevance or sense of purpose is roughly the opposite of meaninglessness as described in the literature on alienation (Seeman, 1975). It occurs when one's work has some intrinsic worth. It is difficult to achieve relevance in a morally ambiguous situation, and American comprehensive high schools by their very nature are expected to provide something for everyone (Newman, 1981). Goal conflicts often result (Miles, 1981). These conflicts have been avoided

by a stance of moral neutrality in which everything is available and responsibility for choosing a program is shifted to the students. Powell, Farrar, & Cohen (1985) refer to this as the "shopping mall high school."

The comprehensive high school is especially irrelevant for the urban student because abstract classroom activities do not relate to the difficult, even threatening situations that many of them face daily (Fine, 1986). Yet, some programs are more relevant to some urban students. Such programs often have out-of-classroom activities that include vocational training, work-study programs, and experiential learning (Hamilton, 1986; Wehlage et al., 1982). Students see the connection between these activities and their after-school lives in ways they cannot with regular courses.

Often students see no connection between classroom activities and the rest of their lives. After observing a passive group of students watch a gym teacher try to teach them European folk dances without even turning on the music, one field worker noted, "My own reaction was that the whole thing was ridiculous. These kids could dance, but this kind of dancing didn't have anything to do with where they were coming from."

Higher achieving students are relatively patient with the school's definition of meaningful activity, but the low achieving students take a much narrower view of what is worth learning:

> I don't see the purpose of algebra. All you need is English and math. The rest just fills in time.
>
> In English you need to learn to speak and read right, but reading stories is pointless.

Yet, students see one kind of meaning in their work very clearly when the activities in question will make them employable:

> I'm in the dental technician program.... Its pretty relevant. We make dentures and partials. We don't scrape. Its a two-year program, and we

> get a certificate at the end....I tell my friends to get in it. They like the pay. Its pretty decent. There's a place in _____ that will start you out and ten dollars an hour.
>
> A high school diploma keeps students in school so they can get a good job. like being a tractor trailer driver.

It is quite clear that these students see a direct connection between what they are doing and their post-high school careers.

While students make their own judgments about what is relevant for their careers, some are woefully ignorant of just what is required of them and what their chances are:

> [To become a pediatrician] you have to go to community college for two years. Then you go to medical school for four years. After that you are an intern for two years. Then you are a regular nurse for two years. Then you do a residency, and after that you can be a doctor and start at $65,000 a year.

Thus, in many cases their assessments of what is meaningful are seriously misguided, and they make judgments about career relevance with insufficient information.

The extent to which students see the connection between schooling and future work opportunities depends in large part upon the design and implementation of formal systems in the school. Two are especially important. The first is the availability of career-oriented programs. Most of these schools have special programs geared to particular career areas: business and finance academies, technology magnets, and junior ROTC programs. These programs rarely serve large numbers of students, but they are highly motivating for the students in them. There are a few other programs that do not have the same career relevance but that also are exciting for the students in them, like the large music magnet program at one school.

The second component is the schools' counseling programs. While some of these do a good job of listening to students and helping them find colleges or

careers that fit them, most are handicapped by pressures on their time, including routine paper work, crisis counseling, and noncounseling work like patrolling halls and lunchrooms. Where there are academies programs and adequate counseling, students appear to be more committed to both learning and to coming to school.

Respect and Affiliation

Affiliation is the opposite of isolation (Seeman, 1975); it occurs when individuals feel connected to others in their surroundings. Isolation in schools often goes beyond a passive disconnection to an active exclusion of students (Newman, 1981). Dropouts, for instance, often believe their teachers are not interested in them (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Programs for at-risk youth that emphasize small size and more personal connections between students and staff are often more effective in engaging their clients in learning activities (Wehlage et al., 1982).

Teachers are often isolated from both their peers and administrators. The one teacher-one classroom organization of schools separates teachers from their colleagues (Warren, 1975). Yet, teachers, like other workers, are more committed when norms and working conditions promote interpersonal attachments (Buchanan, 1974; Zielinski & Hoy, 1983). Moreover, teachers learn from each other so their teaching skills develop more with frequent opportunities for interaction (Rosenholtz, 1985).

Teachers' relationship with the administration are more ambiguous. They want to maintain enough distance to preserve their independence. Yet, the principal is the only adult in regular contact with them who can appreciate their performance. So they would like to have more contact (Firestone, 1980; McPherson, 1979). Overall, the evidence suggests that isolation from

administrators promotes teacher alienation (Zielinski & Hoy, 1983).

The student interviews suggest that for that group the issue of affiliation is how they see themselves treated by adults in the school. What they want is respect, the knowledge that they are being treated with decency and fairness by the adults in the school. Thus, a sense of respect reflects students' perception of the results of teacher blaming. The teachers who blame students for difficult classroom situations are the most likely to display an "attitude" to students, to be abrupt with them, and not explain things in detail. Students receiving such treatment recognize that they are not respected which in turn reduces their commitment to the school.

There is a fairly obvious parallel between how the issue of affiliation applies to students and to teachers. Some teachers have an inkling of this parallel, as one described: "The principal and the vice principal have a punitive attitude towards teachers, like we deal with some kids." As with students, the problem is that they do not feel treated with respect. Teachers look for respect from two sources, the building administration and colleagues. Teachers perceive a wide range of reactions from administrators. In one building a teacher reported that "teachers don't get anything from the administration here or uptown that makes them feel important." In another a teacher reported that "the administration administers this building with love and caring" and made clear that such caring applied to teachers as much as students. This was one of the buildings where teachers were the most committed.

The crucial source of administrative respect is the principal. Assistant principals can contribute to the overall impression set by the principals, but they have relatively little independent effect. This can create a serious strain for the principal. In one high school with over 3000 students, the

principal managed through a cabinet of vice-principals and department heads. Everyone understood and accepted the procedures for taking problems to a first-level official and only bringing to the principal those issues that could not be resolved lower down. However, the department heads who were in regular contact with the principal (and whose efforts he consistently praised) had a greater sense that they were respected and greater commitment to the place than did most other teachers.

Teachers also prize the respect of and interaction with their colleagues. There is considerable range from one school where teachers complained extensively about how their colleagues no longer try to maintain discipline through those with a kind of surface friendliness where teachers report that "We get along very well. We're friendly towards each other, and we always say, 'Good morning.'" to positive extreme is a school where teachers share about instructionally relevant matters:

> The degree of professionalism here is exceptional. At the school I worked at before, the main topic of discussion was retirement. Here people talk about educational issues. What works. Its intellectually stimulating.

Here too, where teachers had the strongest sense of collegiality, commitment was highest.

In many schools, teachers have little opportunity to develop any sense of mutual respect because of their limited opportunities for interaction. Teachers spend most of their time in the classroom. Who they see during the school day is usually a result of their schedules (other teachers with the same preparation periods) and space. Most of these schools lack common department work spaces, for instance. In some schools, administrators recognize the problem and consciously address it through formal systems by developing "collegiality structures" or arrangements that facilitate

interaction among teachers. First efforts are at a social level: Christmas and end-of-the-year parties. Others go deeper. In one school where collegiality was limited, the principals held a weekend, off-campus retreat with outside facilitators to build stronger ties and later rearranged space in the building to increase the number and pleasantness of departmental work spaces.

Support

Administrative support for teachers contributes to their performance and willingness to stay in the field (Dworkin, 1986; Gross & Herriott, 1965). Teachers identify a number of barriers to their work that administrators can minimize. The foremost of these is poor discipline. Teachers expect the principal to control the school's public spaces and to provide a sympathetic court of appeal when they have problems controlling students (McPherson, 1979). In addition teachers expect administrators to reduce paperwork, to back them in disputes with parents, and to minimize interruptions to their classroom routine (Becker, 1952; Bredson et al., 1983; Rosenholtz, 1985). Consistent application of rules creates a more predictable environment so teachers know how to get things done. It also helps with the discipline situation (Organ & Greene, 1981; Rutter et al., 1979). Finally, it reduces role ambiguity (Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). All these acts help teachers achieve the intrinsic rewards that come from working with students.

Another aspect of support is knowing that members of the school will be taken care of and treated fairly. This dependability promotes commitment partly by showing that superiors are committed to the individual and partly by removing distractions so the individual can take care of the job at hand (Steers, 1977). When an administration does not treat teachers fairly and

dependably, teachers will resist its directives (author, 1980).

While support of teachers has been studied extensively, support of students has rarely been conceived in the same way. Yet, many of the same factors ought to work in much the same way for students. Surely, if barriers to learning are removed, students will be more likely to succeed and be less alienated. Moreover, discipline and some of the other barriers may be as important to students as to teachers. A substantial group of students in urban high schools believe that they are routinely treated unfairly by teachers and administrators (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Where students experience such unfair treatment, they become alienated (Natriello, 1982).

The concerns about discipline, rule enforcement, role ambiguity, and fairness come together in a variable called consistency. This sense of fairness, along with the fact that it applies to treatment of teachers as well of students, is what takes consistency beyond tough discipline. From a student perspective, low consistency occurs when administrators say one thing one time and something else later or two administrators (or teachers) would handle the same event quite differently. In the extreme cases lack of consistency is equivalent to breakdown in school discipline, but order can also be maintained in an unfair arbitrary manner. A consistent environment is one where order is maintained, roles are clear, and rules are enforced fairly and rigorously, but not harshly.

There is also a more personalized support that has less to do with consistency than individualized consideration and kindness. Part of the issue here is whether superiors listen to subordinates or simply impose their own way. Students describe such administrative support as follow:

> Mr. X doesn't go into the classroom. He doesn't listen to both sides of the story.

Some principals ignore you while you're talking.

Students respect the principal as an authoritative person who is also caring and understands students problems.

While these administrative actions are especially important, the question of physical support also arises. An important indicator of physical support is the quality of the building. The buildings in the study range from some that are extensively grafittied on the outside with additional marks on the inside, bathrooms with broken fixtures, heating systems that do not function and roofs that leak to others that have been recently remodeled and are bright, cheery and a pleasure to be in. Where buildings are in better shape, both students and teachers appear to be more committed, but building quality appears to have less to do with those commitments than does consistency and administrative support.

Expectations

The expectations theme relies on the theory that when individuals become committed to a performance objective, they will strive to attain it (Salancik, 1977). They will accomplish less when no objective is set or when the objective is too low. However, persistent failure to reach a goal will reduce commitment. The implication of this view is that support ought to be accompanied by a certain amount of stress in the form of high expectations to have commitment improve performance.

The finding that high expectations--namely the belief that all students can attain basic literacy skills--contribute to the success of effective elementary schools fits well with this view (Brookover, et al., 1979; Edmonds, 1979). The implications are similar for both students and teachers. First, where a teacher has high expectations for students, the students will be

committed to accomplishing more and will in fact do so. Second, when a principal holds high expectations for teachers, the teachers will do the same (Wellisch et al., 1978).

The level of expectation varies considerably among these schools. This variation is captured by the concept of instructional press or the extent to which administrators make instruction and achievement a priority and have high instructional expectations for teachers. The schools fit into three relatively distinct groups. In most schools there is little pressure for good teaching and student achievement. Sometime goals are unclear. One principal, when asked about his goals, gave a rambling ambiguous answer and then said, "You have to excuse me. Its been a long time since I've been asked to think about my goals." In another school, a teacher complained that when the principal brought a visiting dignitary into her room, he did not comment on her teaching, but instead pointed out one of his city all-star athletes in the room. In a third, the principal stressed attendance but without clearly linking it to achievement related issues.

A second smaller group tries to create support for instruction. In one school, teachers and administrators agree that "this is a place where teachers can teach" because of the way the school is managed, but there is no special training or pressure for them to teach better. These schools also emphasize providing incentives for students who succeed academically. Finally, one school combines strong management and incentives for students with an extensive program of teacher training and inservice. This program contributes to an unusually high level of reflectiveness about instructional issues among teachers and an unusually high interest in teaching better. Generally, commitment is highest where instructional press is highest. This is especially

true for students.

Influence

Influence is the opposite of the powerless theme in the literature on alienation (Seeman, 1975). Individuals are most highly committed to jobs that give them autonomy and discretion, partly because they have a sense of making a greater contribution to the organization (Buchanan, 1974; Steers, 1977). In education, there has been considerable debate about what kinds of issues teachers want influence over. They clearly value their autonomy in the classroom (Lortie, 1975). School improvement research suggests that teachers are often happy to let others choose the innovations adopted but that influence over detailed planning facilitates implementation (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975). They are willing to forgo participation in major policy deliberations because things that take time from teaching--including those deliberations--are resented (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984). Thus, influence over day-to-day decisions rather than strategic choices is most important.

Teachers' lack of interest in major policy decisions is striking. After talking to superintendents and district staff about major questions of budget, curriculum, and new programs at the start of each site visit, the contrast to the more mundane concerns of teachers is stark indeed. Teachers' sense of control is enhanced when they help set a school's discipline code and it is implemented as designed, when they have the leeway and support they want to try new things in the classroom, and when they can work out their own schedules collectively within their department. Teachers are usually most concerned about budgets when they do not get the supplies they need. They appear less concerned with strategic, financial, curricular, or other

decisions.

Nevertheless, opportunity for teacher influence has a substantial impact on teacher commitment. Some schools establish participation structures for teachers in the form of committees or "open door policies" that really allow for teacher consultation with the principal. Low participation is indicated where neither of these were present or where a formal committee is in place, but the principal vetoes all of its decisions.

Moderate participation structures occur in three ways: 1) when the principal circumvents the existing structure, 2) when the school is so large that teachers do not understand the connection between their input and decisions made or 3) where effective committees are established as needed but teacher input is not well utilized outside those committees. Strong participation structures do not always include special committees. In one school, the principal delegates decisions down to the lowest level and giving teachers considerable support with their ideas. In another some routine, but important, decisions--like the selection of classes individuals will teach--are delegated to departments; and there is easy, direct access to the principal. Clear opportunities for teacher influence as in these last two schools contributes substantially to teacher commitment, especially their commitment to place.

Conclusion

This examination of alienation and commitment in urban high schools has a number of implications for the improvement of these schools. First, it suggests that a consideration of "commitment" is not enough. Students and teachers make different kinds of commitment, and the nature of those commitments affects both the discretionary performance of individuals and the

overall culture of the school. Getting teachers and students committed to the "place" is useful because it gets people to school, but it will not ensure that they will engage in the academic enterprise in a sufficiently serious manner. For that, students must be committed to learning as well. Teachers must be committed to teaching to maintain high standards of performance for themselves and the children with whom they work, but such a commitment without an accompanying commitment to students creates a cold, inhospitable climate. The most difficult task with teachers is building a commitment to teaching.

It is also important to recognize that the commitments of students and teachers interact. In the worst situations, vicious cycles develop where low teacher commitment contributes to and is reinforced by low student commitment. The implication of this view is that addressing the problems of either group without considering those of the others will only lead to partial solutions. Dropout programs that do not consider the attitudes of regular teachers will be undercut by the belief systems of adults in the school. Burnout programs or efforts to professionalize teaching that ignore the behavior of students will only be surface palliatives that make teachers feel better at the time but have no lasting effect.

The suggestions about how to manage schools in order to enhance student and teacher commitment both complement and extend current recommendations for school improvement as can be seen by a comparison of this framework with the effective schools research (e.g., Edmonds, 1979; McKenzie, 1983; Rutter et al., 1979). That research is especially relevant because much of it is geared towards the improved performance of organizations serving the same minority and low SES students as were found in these schools. These findings elaborate two themes from that research: the importance of order and high expectations.

The effective schools research emphasizes the importance of providing a safe orderly environment for students. However, in an era when a high school principal can gain national publicity for maintaining order with a bullhorn and a baseball bat (Time Magazine, February 1, 1988), it is important to recognize that there is more than one way to maintain order. Safety can be purchased at the price of personal freedom and self-respect if a "get tough" orientation is overemphasized.

This framework suggests that where strategies for maintaining order maximize respect for both students and teachers, those individuals will be more committed to the school and its work thereby permitting the creation of a positive setting with less confrontation. More attention can be given to academic activities, and people will be more willing to engage in them. One factor that contributes to such respect is administrative consistency which clarifies role expectations while maintaining a sense of fairness.

The framework incorporates the idea of high expectations but adds important complements to it. One of these is relevance. Low achieving students in particular often deny the importance of the high academic expectations that they have had trouble meeting in the past. They appear more willing to strive to meet those standards when the connection between them and future job performance very clearly. Another complement to high expectations is a professionalized environment. When high expectations are operationalized through mandated curricula and centralized testing systems, they create new pressures for teachers. Teachers are more committed to achieving those standards when other conditions are met. These include such working conditions as physical facilities, adequate supplies, and--most important--a supportive administration. A second factor is collegiality, especially opportunity to discuss approaches to

teaching with other teachers. A third factor is shared influence, not necessarily over major policy decisions, but over the day-to-day decisions that shape their lives and relations with students.

The problems of building commitment are clearly difficult and complex, but they are not impossible. One of the most optimistic findings is that we did identify schools where commitment is high. In two schools we visited, teacher commitment would compare favorably with that of any school in the country, and the commitments of students were unusually high for urban situations. Moreover, the schools were very different in their overall climate and in the administrative means used to build commitment, suggesting that a variety of strategies for building commitment are possible. Together these examples suggest that teacher and student commitment in urban high schools can be substantially higher than they are now. What is required is a vision of how to proceed based on research like this that is shared with building and district administrators, combined with the will to improve the quality of those schools.

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